United Nations S/PV.6520 (Resumption 1)

Security Council

Sixty-sixth year

Provisional

6520th meeting

Thursday, 21 April 2011, 3.20 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Alzate	(Colombia)
Members:	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Vukašinović
	Brazil	Mr. Fernandes
	China	Mr. Sun Xiaobo
	France	Mr. Bonne
	Gabon	Mrs. Ntyam-Ehya
	Germany	Mr. Tillmann
	India	Mr. Kumar
	Lebanon	Mr. Khachab
	Nigeria	Mr. Edokpa
	Portugal	Ms. Cortes Palma
	Russian Federation	Mr. Pankin
	South Africa	Mr. Govender
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Parham
	United States of America	Ms. Kinyon

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

Please recycle

The meeting resumed at 3.30 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in which he requests to be invited to participate in this meeting. Unless I hear any objection, I invite that representative to participate in this meeting.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al Oyaidi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing to the Council. My delegation is delivering this statement on behalf of the Arab delegations to the United Nations.

I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of April. The Arab Group would like to express its appreciation for this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. This meeting takes place as the Israeli Government persists in its intransigence and its illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, jeopardizing the entire peace process.

The Arab-Israeli conflict supersedes all other issues in the Middle East, as there is no other regional conflict that more greatly affects international peace. What exacerbates the situation is the lack of good faith on the part of the Israeli Government, which, instead of seriously engaging in the peace process, continues to confiscate more Palestinian territory, to build illegal settlements, thereby creating new realities on the ground, to kill and unlawfully evict Palestinians, and to confiscate their land and property.

Israeli settlement activities undermine the establishment of a lasting, contiguous and viable Palestinian State. That makes it difficult for any Palestinian Government to function effectively and to convince its people that peace is achievable. It is immoral that a nation under occupation must endure punishment while the occupying Power pursues its settlement activities with impunity. Peace is the only way to achieve security for our Palestinian brothers and for the Israelis, but we doubt Israel's intentions when it shows no sincerity with regard to peace. It continues to undermine the negotiation process and to pursue unilateral actions, which will not lead to peace. It is time for Israel to realize that it is not above the international standards of behaviour, which are based on international law.

Most States gathered in this Council, including the permanent members, have issued separate statements against Israeli settlement activities. What is needed is the adoption of a unified position clearly reflecting that consensus. The Arab States have clearly affirmed their commitment to peace through the Arab Peace Initiative, which was initiated by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and later adopted at the Arab summit in Beirut. The Arab States affirmed their commitment to achieving a just and comprehensive peace based on international law, but there was no reciprocal response or commitment from Israel. There is an urgent need to revive the peace process and for Israel to sincerely and seriously engage in it, including an immediate freeze on settlement construction, and to start dismantling the settlements instead of expanding them.

The current situation in the besieged Gaza Strip is another factor that has exacerbated the problem and turned Gaza into a large prison through the siege imposed by Israel, the occupying Power, unleashing an appalling humanitarian disaster. The Israeli occupying forces continue their barbaric military attacks against the Palestinian people, the most recent of which took place in Gaza on 2 April and caused deaths in Beit Lahia, where many others were also wounded. That was just the latest in a long list of Israeli violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law.

Through its repeated attacks and crimes, Israel shows that it considers itself above the law. It disregards resolutions of international legality and international law and the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. It exploits the international community's silence and reluctance to address Israeli war crimes.

In this context, the Arab Group demands that the United Nations, in particular the Security Council and the Quartet, assume its responsibilities, put an end to the brutal settlement activities and ongoing aggression against unarmed Palestinian people in Gaza, stop the Israeli siege, open the crossings to and from Gaza, and enforce the agreement on border crossings.

On the occasion of the annual Palestinian Prisoners' Day, the Arab Group urges the international community, in particular the Security Council, to compel the Israeli authorities to allow Palestinians to visit their relatives in Israeli prisons and to release the more than 6,000 prisoners being held there, including 300 who have been in Israeli prison for decades.

The Arab Group urges the international community to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particularly those of this Council. It also demands that Israel withdraw its forces from all Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan. The steps that Israel is taking or may take in the future to alter the legal, physical and demographic nature of territories in the Syrian Golan are null and void, and clear violations of the United Nations Charter and resolutions of international legality, including resolution 497 (1981). The Arab Group also demands the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon's Sheba'a Farms, the Kfar Shuba Hills and the northern part of Al-Ghajar. The Arab Group asks that the Security Council strive to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981), the principle of land for peace, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The freezing of the peace process only fans the flames of extremist tendencies and raises despair and frustration to a dangerous level. It is most urgent to take note that the Arab and Islamic public perceives the international community to be lacking in seriousness and credibility. We see the Security Council's inability to implement its own resolutions as a problem resulting from the double standards in international relations, in particular the fact that the use of the veto power incapacitates the Council and makes it unable to assist affected States. When the Security Council is able to resolve this problem, the commitment and respect of all Member States for all Council resolutions will be assured. Such a change will result in making the Security Council more credible and capable of performing the tasks needed to maintain international peace and security.

In conclusion, the Arab Group welcomes the efforts of President Barack Obama to achieve a comprehensive peace and the establishment of a sovereign State for the Palestinian people, living side by side with Israel, as called for in his statement before the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly in 2010 (see A/65/PV.11), in which he spoke of the establishment and recognition of a Palestinian State at the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly, with borders drawn at the lines of 4 June 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mrs. Smith (Norway): This debate comes at a time of momentous developments across the Middle East and North Africa. The popular uprisings in the region are ushering in a period of great opportunity. We are hopeful that the people of the Middle East will be heard in their rightful demands for political participation and human rights. Our message to the regimes and the people is clear — autocratic rule and popular repression belong to the past; democracy and freedom are the future.

In the midst of these historic changes, I would like to take this opportunity to report on another and no less historic event in the history of the Middle East peace process. At the meeting of the international donor group for the Palestinians in Brussels last week, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations reported to the donor community that the Palestinian Authority is above the threshold for a functioning State. The three organizations have concluded that the Palestinian Authority's delivery of public services to its population and implementation of reforms now compare favourably with those of many middle-income countries. The IMF even reported that Palestinian reforms have come so far that the public financial management system is not only ready to support the functions of a State, but has even become a model for other developing countries. At the same time the, Palestinian Authority has reduced its dependence on donor budget support by almost 50 per cent. In other words, we have a functioning Palestinian State structure.

This remarkable progress over the past few years could not have happened without the determination and hard work of Prime Minister Fayyad and his Cabinet, the cooperation and support of the Government of Israel, and the unwavering financial support of the international donor community. This tripartite cooperation within the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee

framework has greatly contributed to the success of Palestinian State-building efforts.

However, there are still challenges that need immediate attention. The Palestinian State-building agenda is rapidly approaching its limits in terms of what it can achieve within the political and physical space available to the Palestinian Authority. As long as Israel maintains control in Area C, which constitutes 60 per cent of the West Bank, economic growth will not be sufficient to enable the Palestinian Authority to become sustainable. To break this cycle and secure the future sustainability of the Authority, Israel needs to take further steps to dismantle restrictions and measures in Area C, allow access to land and water in these areas, and pursue a coherent trade strategy.

As noted time and time again by the international community, the Palestinian State-building track and the political negotiating track are interdependent. Progress on one track can only go so far without progress on the other. For all practical purposes, the State-building process has been completed. The road towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, however, goes through negotiations.

But time is running out. We are only a few months away from the internationally recognized deadline for negotiating a framework agreement on permanent status and a subsequent comprehensive peace treaty. Now is the time for both parties to come back to the negotiating table and show, through decisive action, that this conflict can be ended and the Palestinians can have their own independent, democratic and viable State.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): I have the honour to address the Security Council today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and to start by expressing the Movement's appreciation for the briefing given today by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

The Non-Aligned Movement believes that, at this critical juncture, the international community must renew its resolve to uphold its long-standing commitment to the realization of the two-State solution on the basis of international law and the terms of reference of the peace process. There is an international consensus that we must establish the independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region by September of this year. Upholding that consensus and fulfilling our commitments require urgent collective action on the part of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

NAM regrets that all serious efforts exerted to date by international and regional parties, including the Quartet, to resume and advance direct negotiations on the Palestinian track towards that objective have failed. It is equally alarming for the Movement that merely convening a Quartet meeting is becoming an issue in itself, with consecutive meetings postponed and no apparent determination to put forth a clear and credible vision for achieving the desired solution.

It is also highly regrettable that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to defy the will of the international community and pursues its illegal settlement activities, along with many other policies and practices, in a manner that constitutes the main obstacle to all efforts to resume peace negotiations, thus making it nearly impossible to realize the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders.

Israel's refusal to renew the unilateral moratorium on settlement activities; the recent announcements regarding the establishment of thousands more settlement units at an unprecedented pace; and the continued Israeli demolitions of Palestinian property, including historic places such as the Shepherd Hotel in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of occupied East Jerusalem, and of numerous Palestinian homes in order to build new settlements in the heart of the city all affirm Israel's expansionist intentions and totally contradict the Israeli Government's alleged commitment to the peace process and its sincerity in achieving the two-State solution.

All indications at the present time, including provocative declarations, accelerated illegal construction on the ground and the continued revocation of Palestinian residency rights, reaffirm that Israel is persisting with its unlawful attempts to alter the geographic and demographic situation of the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly East Jerusalem, with a view to establishing new realities on the ground that hamper the final status negotiations. The Security Council should reject and condemn such unlawful acts.

The majority view of the Non-Aligned Movement States that co-sponsored the draft resolution presented earlier this year to the Security Council (S/2011/24) — calling for the immediate cessation of all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, as outlined in relevant letters addressed by the Chair of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement to the President of the Security Council — reflects the international position on this most critical issue. The Non-Aligned Movement regrets the fact that the draft resolution was not adopted by the Security Council as we had hoped and expected.

The Non-Aligned Movement therefore reiterates its call for the Security Council to be resolute in demanding that Israel abide by its legal obligations. Israeli impunity must be tolerated no more and the Security Council has the responsibility to ensure that Israel abides forthwith with all of its obligations, including those under the Fourth Geneva Convention, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Road Map.

In this connection, the Movement takes note with appreciation of the consultations undertaken by the Government of Switzerland to implement the recommendation made by the General Assembly in resolution 64/254, of 26 February 2010, that a Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention be convened on measures to enforce the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. NAM stresses the importance of a speedy resumption of the process of consultations, with a view to convening a Conference of High Contracting Parties at the earliest possible date.

The Non-Aligned Movement condemns the heinous Israeli military attacks on Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip earlier this month, which resulted in the killing of 19 Palestinian civilians, and regrets the fact that the Security Council failed to react after considering this serious matter. We call upon the Security Council to take all necessary measures in order to protect the Palestinian civilian population living under Israeli occupation, in accordance with international humanitarian law and in keeping with the swift actions by the Security Council to protect civilians elsewhere.

In this regard, NAM emphasizes the need to ensure that Israel, the occupying Power, fully lift its illegal blockade on Gaza, in accordance with its obligations under international law, resolution 1860 (2009) and all other relevant United Nations resolutions. This unresolved crisis continues to have serious repercussions for broader efforts to promote peace and unite the Palestinian people, and continues to inflict deep suffering on them.

In this connection, the Movement also emphasizes once again the need for the reconstruction of Gaza, and calls on Israel to open all its crossing points with Gaza and allow for the sustained and regular movement of persons and goods, including the import of essential reconstruction materials, including those needed for the long overdue reconstruction of United Nations facilities and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools, and normal commercial flows. NAM also reiterates the need to empower UNRWA with all the financial and human support needed to undertake its mission effectively.

NAM strongly condemns the continued detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians in Israeli jails, where ill-treatment and torture are widely used. The Movement commends international efforts to shed light on this crisis, including through the convening of the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine in March in Vienna, focusing on the urgency of addressing the plight of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention facilities. It is the conviction of the members of the Movement that those prisoners, who include children and women, should be immediately released, and proper international inspection of their current condition should be a priority for the international community, particularly the Security Council and the Human Rights Council.

There is unanimous agreement on the imperative need for Israel to respect its obligations in order for direct negotiations to be resumed towards a two-State solution, based on resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. The international community, and the Security Council in particular, must exert all efforts to ensure that Israel abides by its obligations and commitments forthwith and resume final status negotiations on appropriate grounds so that we may this year realize the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Turning now to Lebanon, NAM condemns Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanese sovereignty and the recurrence of serious breaches of resolution 1701 (2006). The Movement calls on all parties concerned to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) in order to end the current fragility and avoid a recurrence of hostilities.

Concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan or to impose its jurisdiction and administration there are null, void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The Non-Aligned Movement looks forward to the leadership of the Security Council and the revitalized Quartet setting the parameters that will govern our joint efforts in the run-up to the establishment of the independent State of Palestine in September. The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its commitment to work hand in hand with the Council, the Quartet and other partners to ensure that we achieve our just cause.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Nishida (Japan): Thank you very much, Sir, for giving us this opportunity to address the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing, as well as Ambassador Mansour and Ambassador Reuben for their respective statements.

Japan strongly supports a two-State solution and remains convinced that achieving such a solution through sincere negotiations is the only way to achieve durable peace. We believe that at present there is a lack of mutual trust, which is preventing the resumption of direct negotiations. We call on both sides to engage with the United States and the international community and to take steps that will create an environment conducive to restarting direct negotiations. We strongly encourage both parties to restart direct negotiations.

The two parties must abide by their obligations under previous agreements, most importantly the Road Map. We call on Israel, as we have done on so many occasions, to freeze its settlement activities in the West Bank, which includes East Jerusalem. In this connection, Japan is deeply concerned that the Israeli authorities continue to approve plans to build more settlements. Japan does not recognize any unilateral measures that prejudge the outcome of the final status negotiations.

At the same time, we call upon the Palestinian Authority to continue its efforts to improve security and fulfil its commitments to cease violence and work against incitement. Japan strongly condemns the murder that occurred on 12 March in Itamar, in the north of the West Bank. Only negotiations, not violence, can bring about a resolution of the issues.

According to the assessment provided by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations at the recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, the Palestinian Authority is now above the threshold for a functioning State in key sectors. Japan strongly supports the State-building efforts of the Palestinian Authority and will continue to provide assistance thereto.

We are seriously concerned about the recent escalation of violence along the borders between Israel and the Gaza Strip. We strongly condemn the targeting of civilians. We continue to call for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and call on Israel and the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to refrain from violence and to accept mutual coexistence.

Japan remains concerned about the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. Japan stresses the importance of lifting the blockade while preventing the flow of weapons into the Gaza Strip. We do not agree with the blockade. We also call on those wishing to provide aid to the Gaza Strip to coordinate appropriately with relevant authorities to avoid unforeseen incidents. We call on both parties to make the difficult but necessary decisions to advance peace. Japan will continue to make efforts to realize a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Núñez Mosquera (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba supports the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The situation in the region, in particular in occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, remains deplorable. The situation in the Gaza Strip is unsustainable. Cuba is deeply concerned by the increasing deterioration of conditions there due to the escalation of the military offensive carried out by Israel over the past few months. A ceasefire is urgently needed.

Israel's flagrant and deliberate violations of the provisions of international humanitarian law against the civilian population in Gaza are unacceptable. The international community must take all possible practical measures to put an end to this state of affairs and prevent Israel's indiscriminate bombing of the Palestinian people. Cuba reiterates its demand that Israel immediately, unconditionally and fully lift the cruel and illegal blockade of Gaza and allow the free movement of supplies to and from the Gaza Strip and permanent humanitarian access.

Cuba condemns the settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. We demand the immediate cessation of the demolition of Palestinian houses, the construction of the wall and the eviction of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem, as well as other illegal incitements, provocations and attacks carried out by extremist settlers against the Palestinian people and holy sites. These measures and policies implemented by Israel are serious and flagrant violations of international law, the United Nations Charter, many General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004.

The Security Council cannot remain passive in the face of these facts. Cuba regrets that the recent exercise of the veto by a Council member prevented the adoption of a resolution condemning settlements and demanding an end to these policies. Israel has exploited the Council's silence on this issue in recent years to continue to pursue these illegal policies. The widespread physical, economic and social devastation caused by the illegal and destructive settlement practices is the main obstacle to reaching a peace agreement. The settlement policy prevents, in practical terms, the establishment of a Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders and thus the possibility of a just resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Cuba reaffirms that any measure or action that Israel has taken or shall take to alter the legal, physical and demographic status or institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israeli measures to exercise its jurisdiction and administration in this territory, are legally null and void. We state once again that these measures and actions, including the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Syrian Golan since 1967, are violations of international law, international agreements, the United Nations Charter and resolutions, including resolution 497 (1981), and the Fourth Geneva Convention, and constitute a challenge to the international community. Cuba demands Israel's full withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

A peace agreement must be achieved this year, in accordance with the relevant resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. We have witnessed increasing international recognition of a Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders. We trust that September 2011 will prove the right time to achieve this goal at last.

Cuba once again reiterates its position in favour of a just and lasting peace for all the peoples of the Middle East that would put an end to the occupation of the Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967 and ensure the Palestinian people's exercise of their right to self-determination through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Abdullah (Malaysia): Let me first congratulate you, Sir, on your presidency of this Council and, secondly, align my delegation with the statements made by the representatives of Egypt, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and Tajikistan, on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Malaysia is deeply concerned by the recent disproportionate attacks by Israeli military forces in the Gaza Strip. The attacks have resulted in a number of civilian casualties and, if left unchecked, would lead to greater destruction and further loss of lives, especially among the civilian population in the Gaza Strip. We therefore urge all involved parties to refrain from any provocative act and call on the international community, especially the Security Council and the Middle East Quartet, to act swiftly and decisively to ensure that

Israel ceases its military operations in the Gaza Strip and to prevent any further escalation of violence.

My delegation is also concerned by recent articles and comments appearing in the newspapers regarding the so-called Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48). We are of the view that such comments have not nullified the report or suggested that the author wanted to retract it. In this regard, my delegation supports the statement by the three other co-authors of the report, which, in a way, has further bolstered the process of having Israel answer to the world for having used disproportionate force leading to the death of approximately 1,400 Palestinians during the military onslaught it carried out over two years ago. We would like to state here that the imperatives of peace and justice are mutual, and therefore justice for the Palestinians in Gaza cannot be delayed in order to reach peace.

In this connection, we reiterate our call on Israel to completely lift the blockade on Gaza, which is a form of collective punishment that is forbidden under international law, and to expedite further approval of United Nations projects. Israel must fulfil its legal and international obligations by stopping all settlement activities, the construction of the separation wall and the demolition of Palestinian-owned buildings and infrastructure, particularly in East Jerusalem, which are illegal under international law and represent serious impediments contributing to the deadlock of the peace talks.

Resolving these issues will require the international community to focus all its energy and effort at achieving a comprehensive peace in the region and restoring the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to an independent State of Palestine. All parties must act truthfully and sincerely to achieve these objectives. We again urge the Security Council to take the necessary measures to implement the Council's very own resolutions on Palestine and on the Middle East, failing which the Council's credibility would be at stake.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Apakan (Turkey): As many colleagues have pointed out, historic events are sweeping the Middle East and North Africa. These major developments rightfully deserve the attention of the international community.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian issue is rapidly approaching a critical stage. Turkey continues to believe firmly that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lies at the heart of many disputes in the region and beyond and therefore merits our special attention. That is why the quest for a lasting and comprehensive settlement should not take a back seat to developments in the region. On the contrary, it must once again be our priority.

Despite the current impasse in the peace process due to Israel's unabated settlement activities in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank, we see no alternative to a negotiated settlement. The lack of a solution serves only to perpetuate insecurity and suffering. Turkey attributes importance to the work of the Quartet and hopes that it will meet soon to lay out the parameters of direct negotiations.

The Palestinians have been working hard for the past two years to lay the institutional groundwork of their future State. As evidenced at the recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC), they are ready. Through its State-building efforts, the Palestinian Authority has proved to all skeptics that the Palestinians deserve to attain their decades-long target of internationally recognized statehood, even though they continue to suffer under occupation.

Needless to say, the progress on the ground as reflected in economic figures can be sustainable only if the political process proceeds in parallel with it. In other words, efforts in good faith should not be confined to so-called "economic peace" but should reinforce the political dimension of the peace process and materialize in the form of Palestinian statehood. The time has come to show solidarity with the Palestinians and help them to live in peace and dignity.

In that context, Turkey believes that if the Palestinians are objectively ready to be accepted as a fully fledged State member of the international community, with all the relevant rights and responsibilities — and it is clear that they are on the verge of that momentous step — then the international community cannot and must not turn a blind eye to their just and legitimate appeal.

On the other hand, the plight of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip should urgently be alleviated, and the reconstruction and rehabilitation requirements of the Gaza Strip must urgently be addressed. Security

Council resolution 1860 (2009) must be implemented as a whole. The current humanitarian and human rights conditions of the civilian population in Gaza are unsustainable, unacceptable and, ultimately, not in the interests of any of those concerned. The recent escalation of tensions among the parties is clear proof that the situation is tenuous at best. Minimalist approaches aimed at public diplomacy will not work. Israel must lift its illegal blockade of Gaza immediately.

Meanwhile, achieving national reconciliation among Palestinians also remains an urgent priority. Turkey calls on the Palestinian groups to once and for all end their disunity, embracing a future in their own State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security. In that respect, the international community should extend a helping hand, in an unequivocal manner, to the Palestinians.

Eleven months have passed since the deadly attack by Israeli forces on a humanitarian aid convoy sailing to Gaza, which resulted in nine civilian deaths and many injuries. That was an international incident with ramifications for international peace and security, which is why the Council issued a very firm presidential statement immediately following the event.

Moreover, that tragic episode was also the result of numerous and successive blatant violations of international law by Israel, beginning with the imposition of an unlawful blockade and continuing with the torture and murder of passengers on the international humanitarian aid convoy. Turkey at first tried to prevent this incident; then, once tragedy had struck, it referred the matter to the relevant international bodies. Turkey, for its part, has strictly abided by all the parameters established for the international inquiry process under the auspices of the United Nations, while refraining from unilateral acts and inflammatory statements.

We continue to make every contribution to the inquiry process under the auspices of the United Nations, with the expectation that a fair and just conclusion will be reached. But there should be no question about our resolve with respect to this issue. We will pursue this matter and explore every avenue available in the international system until we are convinced that justice has been done. No member of the international community is above international law. Accountability is the key to stability and security. It should also be borne in mind that the phenomenon of humanitarian convoys to Gaza cannot simply be explained away as unilateral provocations. If the current pattern of Israeli policies towards Gaza, which target the entire population in a disproportionate manner, can be reversed, then the root cause of such reactions will also have been eliminated.

In conclusion, let me reiterate once more Turkey's unwavering support for and determination to assist our Palestinian brothers and sisters in the process of reaching their long-delayed target of a viable, peaceful and prosperous Palestinian State.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Mr. Pedro Serrano, Acting Head of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Serrano: The candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

This debate comes at a time when the international community is faced with a number of challenges in the Middle East region. Nevertheless, the Arab-Israeli conflict remains a focal point and the events across the Arab world, while historic in their own right, mean that we must increase our efforts to address this problem with the utmost priority.

The European Union (EU) firmly believes that the transformational moment we are witnessing is actually an opportunity not to be missed. The parties and the region have waited long enough. Their hopes and aspirations have been dashed too many times. We have invested a great deal of effort in the Quartet in recent weeks, and will continue to do so, because it is our conviction that by complementing and supporting United States efforts, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia, has a contribution to give to the negotiated solution we all hope will be achieved. We also recognize the crucial importance of an active Arab contribution building on the Arab Peace Initiative.

The European Union affirms that unilateral actions by either party cannot prejudge the outcome of negotiations. We must continue to make concerted

efforts towards a negotiated solution. The European Union reiterates that settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible. All settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem, should cease immediately. New construction plans should be abandoned.

Trust between the parties has been seriously undermined. That is why our efforts have been aimed at promoting a credible framework for the resumption of negotiations between the parties on all final-status issues that should lead to a two-State solution by September 2011.

This is an opportunity for the European Union to recall its positions in this regard. We believe that the following parameters could serve as a basis for a resumption of negotiations between the parties: first, an agreement on the borders of the two States, based on the 4 June 1967 lines, with equivalent land swaps as may be agreed between the parties; secondly, security arrangements that, for Palestinians, respect their sovereignty and show that the occupation is over, and, for Israelis, protect their security, prevent the resurgence of terrorism and deal effectively with new and emerging threats; thirdly, a just, fair and agreed solution to the refugee question; and fourthly, fulfilment of the aspirations of both parties for Jerusalem. A way must be found, through negotiations, to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both States.

The European Union has a strong track record as a supporter of and large contributor to Prime Minister Fayyad's State-building programme. At the recent Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting on 13 April, hosted by European Union High Representative Catherine Ashton in Brussels, there was a unanimous acknowledgment that the Palestinian Authority's State-building effort has gained renewed momentum in the past two years as the international community has coordinated its efforts to support the plans to build a sustainable economy and to strengthen State institutions. The European Union welcomes the assessment of the United Nations and the international financial institutions that the Palestinian institutions are above the threshold for a functioning State in the key sectors they studied and compare favourably with those in many established States, despite the continuing occupation and the divide between the West Bank and Gaza.

The European Union strongly supports this institution-building process. In this regard, the European Union welcomes the organization of a second international donors conference for the Palestinian State this June in Paris. The European Union has further increased the component devoted to institution-building assistance, which this year amounts to €75 million out of €300 million earmarked for the occupied Palestinian territory. However, the significant achievements of the Palestinian people will be sustainable only if there is a political breakthrough.

The European Union regrets the renewed violence witnessed in the past weeks. European Union High Representative Catherine Ashton has made clear statements condemning mortar and rocket attacks out of the Gaza Strip, in particular the recent attack on a school bus, which resulted in the death of a student, and has called for these attacks to stop immediately and permanently. She has also deplored the loss of civilian life in Gaza and called on Israel to show restraint. The lives of civilians must be protected everywhere and in all circumstances. The European Union urges full respect for international humanitarian law. The announced ceasefire must be fully respected by all sides if there is to be any hope of a genuine peace process. The European Union calls on those holding the abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit to release him without delay.

The European Union firmly reiterates its calls for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) calling for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, including goods and persons from the West Bank. The European Union calls on all international supporters to make use of the existing land crossings to channel their support to Gaza.

Increased and accelerated imports of construction materials are another crucial component of Gaza's recovery. Despite some progress following the decision of the Government of Israel in June 2010 regarding Gaza access, further efforts are needed to achieve a fundamental change of policy that allows for the reconstruction and economic recovery of Gaza and improves the daily lives of the population while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns.

The European Union reiterates its readiness to contribute substantially to a comprehensive and

sustainable solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Diallo (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, allow me to warmly congratulate you, Sir, on the exemplary manner in which you have been steering the work of the Council this month. I would also like to express my appreciation to Ambassador Li Baodong, Permanent Representative of China, for his efficient presidency of the Council in March.

I would also like to express my appreciation to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for today's excellent briefing, in which he vividly described the volatile situation on the ground, particularly in the Gaza Strip, and called on the international community to engage with the parties to create conditions conducive to the resumption of the peace process.

The recent upsurge in violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly the Gaza Strip, is a cruel reminder of how tense and fragile the situation remains. The rocket fire by Palestinian militants and reprisals by Israeli forces have claimed numerous victims, most of them Palestinian civilians. Our Committee calls on the parties to refrain from all provocation and to act responsibly, and unequivocally condemns all attacks on civilians, who urgently require protection.

We are hopeful that the Council will assume its Charter responsibilities by acting as resolutely and with the same vigour as it has in other ongoing conflict situations. It must also redouble its efforts to ensure the full implementation of its resolution 1860 (2009) in order to end the Gaza blockade and restrictions on the freedom of persons and goods, and to promote inter-Palestinian reconciliation.

We look forward to the resumption of serious direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians on all permanent status issues before the September target date set by the Quartet. In that respect, we call on the Quartet to speedily endorse the recent initiative of the United Kingdom, France and Germany to restart negotiations leading to the signing of an agreement on Jerusalem as the capital of two States, Israel and Palestine, founded on the basis of the borders of June 1967; to the reaffirmation of the illegality of settlements; to a just, consensual solution to the refugee question; and to security arrangements ending the Israeli occupation.

The negotiations will succeed only if the parties implement in good faith their road map obligations, in particular a complete freeze of all Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, including so-called natural growth. I take this opportunity to register our disappointment with the Council's lack of leadership on this important issue, and its unwillingness to reaffirm its previous positions and to adopt the pertinent draft resolution, which enjoyed vast support among Member States. Israel's unfortunate recent approval of over 900 additional housing units in Gilo in East Jerusalem illustrates the fact that the issue is not going away. It is the Council's Charter and moral obligation to intervene.

We are pleased to note the recognition of the State of Palestine by numerous Member States. These countries and many others are supporting the Palestinian Authority's programme to build the State by September. The United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have confirmed that the Palestinians now have the institutional structure necessary to administer their own State.

Since the most recent open debate of the Council under this agenda item (see S/PV.6484), our Committee has held international meetings in Vienna and Montevideo devoted to achieving Israeli-Palestinian peace. We remain fully committed to and will continue to promote the objective of a two-State solution, in conformity with Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, whereby Israel and the State of Palestine will live side by side in peace and security. The United Nations and its Security Council have a very special responsibility to ensure the realization of this vision. I assure the Council of the Committee's cooperation and support in the implementation of its own resolutions on the Palestinian question.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tajikistan.

Mr. Neziri (Tajikistan): I have the pleasure to deliver the following statement on behalf of the members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Tajikistan's capacity as Chair of the OIC group.

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing. I also would like to express our deep appreciation to the Colombian presidency of the Security Council for the convening of this timely meeting and for giving the OIC group the opportunity to address the Council.

The Palestinian question remains a top priority and a challenge for the entire international community. The implementation and fulfilment of our collective political commitments, resolutions and pledges on this issue have been pending for more than half a century. The OIC group remains firm in its conviction that the Security Council must not be absolved of its role in this regard and should act forthwith to ensure the realization by the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination, sovereignty and independence in their State of Palestine in the territory occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, including a just solution for the plight of the Palestine refugees in line with United Nations resolutions and international law.

Our debate today acquires extraordinary importance, given that it coincides with the difficult situation that millions of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, continue to endure. Despite resolution 1860 (2009), of 8 January 2009, Israel, the occupying Power, continues its military aggression against the Gaza Strip. The illegal Israeli blockade remains in force, thereby continuing to affect the lives of the entire Palestinian civilian population of Gaza — preventing their access to humanitarian aid and basic materials; impeding reconstruction, including by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the United Nations Development Programme, of the thousands of destroyed homes and infrastructure; and obstructing economic and social recovery. In this regard, the OIC group continues to call for serious follow-up to the findings and recommendations of the investigations of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict as an essential step to ensuring justice and accountability and averting further human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territory by Israel, the occupying Power.

In the West Bank, Israel continues its illegal settlement construction, home demolitions, violent military raids, movement restrictions and land confiscation, imposing hundreds of checkpoints and detaining thousands of Palestinians. It also continues to build the annexation wall, in clear violation of international law and the legal authority of the advisory opinion (see A/ES-10/273) of the International Court of Justice. These violations are most intense and aggressive in occupied East Jerusalem, where Israel also continues a systematic process to alter the historic Palestinian-Arab-Islamic identity of Al-Quds Al-Sharif through its flagrant attempts to Judaize the city by changing its demographic composition and character.

Today, the OIC group reaffirms the centrality of the cause of Al-Quds Al-Sharif for the entire Islamic Ummah and stresses the Palestinian, Arab and Islamic nature of occupied East Jerusalem and the need for full respect for the sanctity of Islamic and Christian holy places in the city. The OIC group also reaffirms that Al-Quds Al-Sharif remains an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967, and that its illegal annexation by Israel continues to be rejected and unrecognized by the international community.

We affirm that the resolution of the entire Middle East conflict is dependent on solving its core issue, which is the Palestinian question. The international consensus to realize the vision of two States requires a clear stance based on international legitimacy and justice. There must be full acknowledgement of, and respect for, the historic commitments and pledges made in that regard, as embodied in the terms of reference of the peace process, namely, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, to which the OIC subscribes, and the Quartet Road Map. Every effort must be exerted by the Security Council as well as by the Quartet, in the light of its declared commitment to fulfil the collective legal and moral responsibilities relevant to the realization of peace, justice and security in the region this year.

At this crucial stage, there must also be acknowledgement of, and continued full support for, Palestinian State-building efforts, which are advancing successfully. Since, regrettably, the peace process

remains in a sate of stagnation, the time is ripe to recognize the independent State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, as that is the cornerstone for achieving stability, prosperity, peace and security for Palestine, Israel and other neighbouring countries in the region.

The OIC also joins the international community's stance reaffirming that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structures, as well as Israeli measures to impose its jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect. The OIC demands that Israel abide fully and immediately by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as from the remaining Lebanese occupied land.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm the full support and solidarity of the OIC with the Palestinian people in their endeavour to regain their legitimate and inalienable national rights, including their rights of return, self-determination and to establish their independent Palestinian State on their national soil, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to say that my country is an important party to the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as to reiterate two vital points. First, the Syrian Golan Heights have remained under Israeli occupation since 1967. Secondly, when my country was a non-permanent member of the Security Council from 2001 to 2003, we proposed that the Council convene an open public meeting every three months to consider the situation in the Middle East.

My delegation would like to thank the Columbian presidency of the Council for convening this open debate to discuss the escalation of Israeli aggression against the occupied Arab territories. We would also like in particular to thank the Permanent Representative of China for his excellent work as President of the Council last month.

In the many decades of the Israeli occupation that began in June 1967, the Security Council, the General Assembly and other United Nations bodies have adopted hundreds of resolutions calling upon Israel to end its occupation of Arab territories and its massacres of unarmed and unprotected Palestinian people. Sadly, in spite of all those resolutions, the facts show that Israel continues to engage in organized and systematic practices and is not subject to international accountability for its violations of the basic principles of international law and international humanitarian law. This demonstrates that Israel is defying international law.

Among its main hostile acts that have been internationally condemned is its feverish settlement campaign in occupied Arab lands, including its seizure of land, the destruction of houses and expulsion of its inhabitants and the settling of herds of foreign colonialist settlers in those houses — to say nothing of its construction of the racist separation barrier and the Judaization of occupied Jerusalem. All of his is happening right under the noses of the very people who call for the protection of human rights while closing their eyes to flagrant Israeli violations of human rights in the occupied Arab territories.

Moreover, all of this is taking place while the Security Council remains ineffectual in exercising its duty and obligations to enforce international peace and security in accordance with the purposes and principles and of the United Nations Charter. The most recent example of this was the Council's non-adoption of a draft resolution (S/2011/24) calling on Israel to end its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories (see S/PV.6484), in spite of the fact that the draft resolution and the principle of the illegality of Israel's settlement activity both enjoyed international consensus.

Two years have gone by since the Israeli aggression against Gaza began. During that action, Israel committed war crimes and serious violations of humanitarian law considered to be crimes against humanity. But the Israeli perpetrators of those crimes have not been held accountable or subjected to any punishment. Israel continues to reject the rebuilding of schools and other facilities by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and is preventing all such activities and projects in Gaza. That has only encouraged Israel to pursue its inhuman embargo against the people living in Gaza. In addition, Israel is once again threatening further aggression against the second humanitarian

flotilla, which is planning to provide humanitarian aid. Israel is committing further aggression against Gaza and is undertaking further massacres of Palestinians, creating dozens of innocent casualties and many hundreds of wounded civilians.

In this context, we are shocked by the lack of any response from the international community to the appeals by the Palestinian people. For many decades, the international community has ignored the Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people and its continued occupation of Arab land. In the past few days, the League of Arab States has called upon the Security Council to adopt a resolution to impose an air embargo against Israeli airplanes attacking Gaza, so as to protect unarmed civilians and to put an end to the unjust embargo. We therefore call on the Security Council to follow up immediately on that demand by the League of Arab States to protect Palestinian civilians. We reaffirm that the protection of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese civilians living under Israeli occupation and subject to Israeli attacks on a daily basis is an integral part of the issue of protecting all civilians without distinction.

The Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan is also a very serious issue. Israel refuses to return and reintegrate the Syrian Golan into Syria and flouts international resolutions, in particular resolution 497 (1981), which declares the occupation of the Syrian Golan by Israel to be completely illegal, null and void. Israel is continuing its policy of terror and repression against Syrian civilians in the Golan, as well as to imprison Syrian citizens. It is also seizing land and continuing settlement activities, including its most recent settlement campaign in the Syrian Golan. A council of settlers in the Golan has undertaken a new provocative measure in the form of a publicity campaign for the building of new settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan. The campaign, called "Welcome to Golan", is responsible for transferring 3,000 Israeli settler families to the Golan.

The Israeli Knesset recently adopted a law requiring a general referendum before any Israeli retreat from the occupied Syrian Golan or occupied East Jerusalem. This is in total disregard for international law and the resolutions of the Security Council, in particular resolutions 497 (1981) and 487 (1981). We reiterate that this measure is totally rejected and unacceptable and does not change the fact that the Golan is occupied Syrian land and that the restoration of the entire Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967 must be the basis of any peacebuilding arrangements. We hold the Israeli Government responsible for all these hostile and provocative policies.

In their statements today, some permanent members of the Council have referred to the situation in my country. They have spoken in biased terms and have made very dangerous exaggerated statements. I would like to draw the attention of the Security Council to the following.

On Saturday, 16 April, Syria's President chaired the first meeting of the new Government. He called on the Government to be active and to take immediate action in order to launch a number of draft proposals to ensure reforms and promote national democracy and citizen participation, for the purpose of consolidating national unity, stability and security for the country and its citizens. Four days after that meeting, the Government submitted three draft laws, which were signed by the President and entered into force today, lifting the emergency law, dismantling the Supreme State Security Court and granting the right to peaceful demonstrations. The Government is now working expeditiously on a number of new draft laws on political parties, the media and local administrations.

President Al-Assad is seen by all as a reforming leader, because he is aware of the fact that these reforms are a national necessity — exclusively national. Needless to say, any reform in any State Member of the United Nations is, according to the Charter, a domestic issue. All must respect the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States, including some permanent member States. Such reforms must not be obstructed by obstacles that could only serve foreign interests and agendas. Whoever encourages reform from the outside cannot deliberately ignore the fact that reforms and measures have been undertaken on the ground. Those individuals must not endeavour to undermine the very well-known Syrian model of reform, which is based on tolerance and co-existence among the various sectors of the country's population.

A number of calls have been made in the Security Council, including for the overthrow of legitimate Governments. Those who make such calls are responsible for negative incitement and for irresponsible acts that harm the interests of peoples and Governments. That represents a clear violation of the United Nations Charter and an irrational attempt to use

international law to take advantage of this meeting on the situation in the Middle East, which is limited to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in particular the question of Palestine. Thus, it is a misuse of that agenda item to ignore the underlying aspects of the problem. It also encourages the continuing Israeli aggression and occupation and the Israeli Government's engagement in further violence and settlement expansion. Furthermore, it encourages intransigence and defiance of the wishes of the international community and the Palestinian people for peace.

We would have liked to hear the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom express, if only just once, their sympathy for and empathy with the suffering of the Syrians living in the Syrian Golan, occupied since 1967. We would have liked to hear those two delegations call on Israel to put an end to the state of emergency that has been in effect in that country since 1948 to this day. The state of emergency has been used to seize Palestinian territory, to destroy houses and expel their inhabitants, and to allow gangs of Israeli settlers to occupy the land. Furthermore, Israel has exploited an emergency regulation enacted under the British Mandate in 1939 and applied to all of Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Tarar (Pakistan): We congratulate you, Sir, on steering the work of the Security Council this month with dedication and finesse.

We align ourselves with the statements delivered by the Permanent Representatives of Egypt and Tajikistan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, respectively.

During the most recent debate on the Middle East in this Chamber (see S/PV.6484), most of us lamented the breakdown of Palestine-Israel direct negotiations and its implications for peace in the region. Three months later, the pall of gloom is heavier. The prospects for a resumption of the Middle East peace process are not encouraging. The slight window of opportunity for sustainable peace, created by the recent reduction in violence, appears to be slipping through our fingers. To make matters worse, the Middle East Quartet also appears to be increasingly hamstrung in its efforts to facilitate the resumption of direct negotiations and to specify the parameters of the final settlement. That was made evident by the recent postponement of the Quartet's Berlin meeting.

Amidst such despair, the Security Council, too, has abdicated its role in the settlement of the question of Palestine to individual countries or informal groupings. It is worrisome to note that the Council's only activities in regard to the Palestinian issue are its quarterly open debates, where even spirited and well-drafted statements fail to cure the somnambulance of their audience, which knows only too well that the stalemate is as immutable as the proverbial North Star.

The only ray of hope in this pessimistic scenario is the impressive march of the Palestinian Authority on the road to statehood. Numerous independent sources have confirmed that building State institutions by August is well within the reach of the Palestinian Authority. According to recent reports prepared by the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund for the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee of the Middle East Quartet, the Palestinian Authority is above the threshold of a functioning State in several key sectors. Its fiscal performance and high rates of economic growth in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have been duly acknowledged in those reports. The Quartet itself has welcomed that assessment and stated that Palestinian institutions compared favourably with those of established States. The Palestinian Authority's policies of self-reliance, empowerment and creating economic opportunities have disabused even the occupiers of their ability to justify the illegal occupation as a necessary evil.

The attainment of the goal of a Palestinian State by September is well within our grasp. Letting it founder on the rocks of cynicism, inaction or political expediency would have serious consequences for peace and stability. The failure to meet the 1999 deadline set in the Oslo Accords triggered the second intifada. The missing of the 2005 deadline for Palestinian statehood, as set in the Quartet Road Map of 2003, precipitated violence and bloodshed and culminated in the siege on Gaza and its violent aftermath. September 2011 cannot become just another date in that tragic chronology.

The people of Palestine have already travelled more than halfway in honouring their side of the bargain. Israel must reciprocate with an open mind and in good faith. It must stop all settlement activity in the occupied Arab territories and fulfil its obligation to respect the human rights of the Palestinian people.

Israel's blockade of Gaza is neither conscionable nor tenable. Israel must also facilitate the completion of reconstruction projects, including those undertaken by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Pakistan is supportive of lasting peace for all inhabitants of the Middle East, irrespective of their religion, ethnicity or nationality. As Palestinian statehood emerges from the debris of broken promises, it should not be stymied by violence. We join other delegations in calling for a prevailing ceasefire in Gaza.

The framework for peace in the Middle East is set forth in detail in resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008); the Madrid terms of reference; the Arab Peace Initiative; and the Quartet Road Map. Mustering and sustaining the political will to implement the framework is imperative.

We hope that the Security Council and the Middle East Quartet will engage themselves meaningfully with the parties concerned to realize the collective objective of the international community for an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, living side by side and in peace with all of its neighbours. Pakistan shares and supports that objective.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): Sir, your presidency of the Security Council comes at a very difficult time in the international situation, one which has required consultations and resolutions. The Colombian presidency has demonstrated its wisdom, perceptiveness and vision. This does honour to your friendly country and its work, which deserves all possible praise.

My delegation associates itself with the statements made by the representatives of Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Arab Group, Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and Tajikistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and would like to express the concerns of the Kingdom of Morocco over the delays in the efforts to breathe new life into the peace negotiations and over developments in Gaza and the other occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

Only a few months remain before the international community's deadline for enabling the Palestinian people to achieve their legitimate aspirations to establish an independent and viable Palestinian State within the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with Israel. In that context, my delegation would like to express its appreciation for the efforts of President Barack Obama of the United States to honour the commitments he made in his statement to the General Assembly on 23 September 2010 (see A/65/PV.11) concerning the right of the Palestinians to establish an independent Palestinian State within a specific time frame. We also feel very optimistic about the continued efforts of the United States to fulfil those commitments, based on the established terms of reference of the peace process and in accordance with international law, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

We look forward to continued international and regional efforts, based on the same vision, to achieve the same objectives. Such efforts would support and complement the positive dynamism that emerged for an unfortunately brief period in the wake of the resumption of direct negotiations last September in Washington, D.C., under the auspices of the United States. In that context, the role of the Quartet, with all its elements and international influence, remains extremely important to the task of launching a new and effective impetus for the negotiations that would bolster the Quartet's credibility and be judged on the basis of its concrete results in September.

While we must voice our deep regret that the Quartet's meetings in March and April have been delayed, we value the constructive ideas produced by the delegations of France, the United Kingdom and Germany during the Security Council's meeting on 18 February (see S/PV.6484) on the objectives that must be attained, the most important of which is enabling the Palestinian people to establish an independent State in the territories occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. This vision is consonant with the Arab Peace Initiative and appropriately lays the ground for overcoming the obstacles to direct negotiations.

Since the suspension of direct negotiations, Israel has continued to forcibly annex more Palestinian territory, build more settlements, demolish houses and expel their owners from their ancestral cities and villages. Israel's persistence in building settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories is an illegal act that cannot lead to sincere negotiations for a comprehensive and just solution on the basis of international efforts. Settlement construction is an obstacle that cannot be overcome or circumvented; it must be eliminated.

Occupied Jerusalem and adjacent areas are no exception; not only have they not been spared such practices, they have been targeted more heavily than others. Israel has continued its illegal policy of Judaizing that city, which is sacred to all revealed religions. It has sought to change its original character and to build more housing units for its settlers, depopulating it of its Palestinian residents through forcible expulsions, home demolitions and revocation of their residency rights, in blatant violation of international humanitarian law and various Security Council resolutions. The Israeli authorities have continued to attack Islamic shrines; the international community must reject that policy, for it can only lead to increased religious friction both inside and outside the area.

Given its responsibilities as an Arab and Islamic State, and the responsibilities of His Majesty King Mohammed VI as Chair of the Jerusalem Committee of the OIC, Morocco denounces such acts, which affect the special legal status of that holy city and the rest of the Palestinian territories in blatant violation of international legitimacy and the foundations necessary to a just peace. We appeal to the international community to shoulder its responsibilities and to call unequivocally on Israel to end its unilateral actions and respond sincerely and positively to international efforts to resume negotiations forthwith in a way that will lead to their success.

The Gaza Strip is still enduring the frequent escalation of Israeli military operations, exacerbating a situation that was aggravated from the start by the blockade imposed on the civilian population, preventing them from enjoying the bare minimum of humanitarian assistance and the infrastructure necessary for survival. In this regard, we pay tribute to the continuing vital role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and its support for the Palestinian people inside the occupied territories and in neighbouring countries. We welcome all initiatives to provide UNRWA with the financial and human resources needed to pursue its vital mandate to ensure the basic living conditions for an extremely important segment of the Palestinian population.

It is no secret that all the elements of a just and comprehensive peace based on two functioning, viable States can be implemented. No one questions the Palestinian people's resolve and sincere desire to live in peaceful coexistence and national reconciliation. The only thing remaining is for Israel to demonstrate political will and a vision of a future free of hegemony. International efforts must be made to move the dynamics of the peace process forward in a region that has seen enough wars and tragedies, and in which all people can look forward to freedom, dignity and peace.

The Kingdom of Morocco, based on its support for peace, international law and legitimacy, the relevant resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, still supports and holds fast to the two-State solution providing for an independent, viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel. We also urge Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and all remaining occupied Lebanese territory.

Every country and people of the region has had enough of the obstacles blocking the road to peace, the violence and counter-violence, the victims, tragedies, destruction, mistrust, hatred and alienation. It is high time to effect real and drastic change in the situation through the firm implementation of international law. It is high time for Israel to demonstrate genuine resolve and will to respond to the Arab Peace Initiative and a commitment to living side by side with its neighbours and to building a cooperative, prosperous, secure and safe future for all.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Uganda.

Mr. Lukwiya (Uganda): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of my Permanent Representative, Ambassador Ruhakana Rugunda. I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing this morning.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has remained unresolved for far too long, despite protracted international and regional efforts. The situation is not sustainable. We recall the international community's optimism following the resumption of direct talks between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and

President Mahmoud Abbas, and are deeply concerned about the loss of momentum in the peace process in the wake of the breakdown of the talks.

It is now more urgent than ever for both parties to redouble their efforts towards the achievement of a comprehensive peace based on the vision of the two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. We encourage Israeli and Palestinian leaders alike to resume negotiations without further delay. We call upon both parties to summon the necessary courage to take bold decisions in a spirit of give and take.

In that regard, it is essential to refrain from unilateral actions that prejudge final status issues and undermine progress. It is also important to bear in mind that the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians to statehood cannot be delayed much longer and that the legitimate security concerns of Israel must be addressed.

We remain deeply concerned about the continued construction of settlements by Israel and call for a complete freeze on all settlement activity, which not only hinders progress in the negotiations, but also undermines Israel's security. We salute the Palestinians for their continued efforts to fulfil their obligations under the Road Map, particularly in the security and economic development sectors. We also commend President Abbas on his initiative to resolve the current divisions among Palestinians, and encourage him to intensify efforts on that important component.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains dire, and we reiterate our call for a complete lifting of the blockade on Gaza. We deplore the continued firing of rockets into Israel by Hamas and the airstrikes on Gaza by Israel during the reporting period. We call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint, to avoid further escalation and to fully implement resolution 1860 (2009).

In conclusion, while the primary responsibility for negotiating and reaching a comprehensive agreement lies with the Israeli and Palestinian parties, the efforts and support of all international and regional partners must be stepped up for that goal to be attained sooner than later.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): I begin by thanking your country, Colombia, and you personally, Mr. President, for steering this very important open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to convey our appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing this morning. I also wish to state that the Bangladesh delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of Egypt and Tajikistan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, respectively. In addition, I wish to briefly make certain points that Bangladesh believes to be of importance.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, has always been of major concern to the international community and the United Nations. A durable and sustainable resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the issue of Palestine, which is at the root of the long-lasting crisis, must therefore be our collective strategic objective. All Member States should pledge complete commitment to that objective and throw their full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support behind its early realization. Bangladesh is always ready to play a constructive role in that collective endeavour to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on the two-State principle. Bangladesh joins the international community in reaffirming its full support for the Palestinian people in their just and legitimate struggle for self-determination and freedom from continued occupation and oppression.

The people of Palestine are being denied their fundamental right to self-determination and to live freely in their own land, and displaced Palestinians have been denied their right to return home and to live in dignity and safety. Unfortunately, this appears to be the result of a collective failure on the part of the international community, in particular the people of Israel, who have suffered deprivation as they have failed to rise to the occasion by guaranteeing the people of Palestine their fundamental right to self-determination and a sovereign State of their own, side by side with theirs. In order to achieve a lasting solution in the Middle East, it is very important to address the key issue, which is Israel's prolonged and illegal occupation of the Arab territories.

We commend the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority and continued Palestinian State-building efforts. However,

we are concerned about the disproportionate military strikes and unabated atrocities, causing civilian casualties. Therefore, we call for maximum restraint and respect for international humanitarian law. Furthermore, we regret the discontinuation of Israel's 10-month moratorium on settlement activity, and strongly reaffirm that unilateral actions by either party cannot prejudge the outcome of negotiations.

Let me also reiterate our support for the conclusion of such negotiations by September. It is our belief that further delay in the resumption of negotiations is detrimental to the prospects for regional peace and security. We urge the parties and others concerned to urgently strive to expedite Israeli-Palestinian and comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, which is essential to avoid outcomes detrimental to the region.

My delegation believes that direct negotiations will be successful only if there is sustained regional and international support for the talks, the parallel process of Palestinian State-building and the pursuit of a just, lasting and comprehensive regional peace, as envisaged in the Fourth Geneva Convention; the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978);the principle of land for peace; the Madrid terms of reference, which guarantee Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab and Palestinian territories to the 4 June 1967 line; the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, which are the best guides for achieving a two-State solution.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Bangladesh's long-standing position that the continued illegal occupation of Palestine over the past six decades is the root cause of violence, unrest and destabilization in the region. Let me also reiterate our full support for a lasting peace for all inhabitants of the region, Arabs and Israelis alike, and our strong commitment to the realization of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side in peace with all its neighbours.

In this holy month, when the people of Israel celebrate their freedom from slavery and the clutches of Pharaoh, we look forward to a global commitment and meaningful action on the ground for the people of Palestine to be freed from Israeli occupation, ending years of deprivation, suffering, attacks, counterattacks, death, misery, fear, uncertainty and tension for all people of this region, Arab and non-Arab.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Seruhere (United Republic of Tanzania): Mr. President, thank you for convening this meeting. The United Republic of Tanzania is pleased to see Colombia preside over the Security Council and host deliberations on the situation in the Middle East, in particular the question of Palestine. We commend the commitment and efficiency with which you are leading the deliberations.

The Security Council decided in 1948 to create two States, Palestine and Israel, co-existing in peace in some part of the Middle East. However, politics, group interests and individual acrimony eventually led to the disintegration of the United Nations arrangement. The Cold War served only to exacerbate the situation.

Since 1948, a lot of statements have been made in the Council urging it to rectify the situation, to no avail. Must we continue talking endlessly as if no one is listening? The situation in the Middle East situation and question of Palestine were created by human beings, using the Security Council. The issues can also be solved by human beings using the same Council or any other means of their choice at their disposal.

We cannot afford to say that the Security Council has failed to solve the Palestinian question. We are all aware that discontent causes conflict and that conflict has by-products that we cannot always predict and which we do not always like. In any conflict, the parties involved lose property and lives. Let us therefore think not only of war and conquest; let us also think of making durable peace and go for it.

The Quartet elaborated a Road Map that would lead to a two-State solution of Palestine and Israel living with each other in peace. I believe that the Council has not failed to pursue this option. Let the Security Council pledge to us and vow that, at its next meeting, it will tell us about results, and not about work in progress.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Goledzinowski (Australia): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the

work you are doing as President of the Council, including chairing this debate, which comes at a critical juncture.

The region has undergone some dramatic changes since the last Council debate on the situation in the Middle East (see S/PV.6484). As events show dramatically, the people of the region have made it clear that their aspirations are to greater political, social and economic opportunities and that they must be addressed.

But in the face of these regional tectonic shifts, one crucial issue — the peace process — has stalled. Australia has consistently supported a just and enduring peace based on a negotiated two-State solution, allowing Israel and a future Palestinian State to live side by side in peace and security. There is a now an urgency to achieving progress towards peace — an urgency that our Government conveyed to Israeli and Palestinian leaders during our Foreign Minister's visits to the region in December 2010 and again in March 2011, and in regular conversations since then.

Australia continues to urge all sides to exercise maximum restraint, avoid all civilian casualties and return to negotiations as soon as possible. If these steps are not taken and credible progress towards peace not made, there is a real risk that the surge in violence we saw in March will be repeated, with unacceptable civilian casualties on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides.

Australia is deeply concerned at this recent surge in violence in Israel and the Palestinian territories, including rocket attacks on southern Israel by militants in Gaza and the killing of civilians in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem. Violence undermines the prospects for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Above all, all of us must condemn terrorism in all its forms; there can never be justification for the wilful killing of innocent civilians through such brutal acts.

As a strong supporter of Palestinian State-building efforts, Australia welcomes the remarkable progress made by Prime Minister Fayyad and the Palestinian Authority since 2009 in building the institutions necessary for Statehood. It is clear that this institution-building must be matched by political progress towards peace — political progress involving both sides, negotiating directly on final status issues. In this context, both sides must refrain from actions which undermine confidence and the prospects for achieving peace, including the construction of illegal settlements. Settlements undermine the prospects for achieving peace and compromise the future of a two-State solution. They should stop.

Australia also remains concerned at the humanitarian situation, particularly in Gaza. We continue to welcome the relaxation of some Israeli restrictions on access to and from Gaza and recognize Israel's legitimate security concerns. However, the restrictions remain a barrier to peace. Gaza does not need ad hoc assistance measures, even if well-intentioned; it needs predictable and adequate flows of goods and materials. The United Nations will continue to have a critical role to play in addressing the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza.

In conclusion, the changes in the wider region underline the urgency of achieving progress towards peace. Australia calls upon Israelis and Palestinians alike to recognize that it is in their mutual interest to return to direct negotiations so that a just and enduring peace can finally be realized.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Mr. Shaanika (Namibia): I join other representatives in thanking Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East. Namibia aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Let me at the outset reaffirm Namibia's unequivocal and unwavering support for and solidarity with the people of Palestine in their quest to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination. Namibia believes that the right to self-determination is a fundamental human right and that the international community is duty-bound, in accordance with its legal and political obligations, to assist the Palestinian people to achieve this right as soon as possible. Namibia was once an occupied territory. Its people know too well the harsh reality of living under occupation. We wish to see the people of Palestine emerge from the chains of oppression just as we emerged from them 21 years ago.

This year began with dramatic events in the Middle East, marked by the democratic aspirations and demand for freedom, justice and human rights. The situation in Palestine is even more urgent. However,

Israel's unlawful construction of settlements and its demolition of Palestinian homes and property, including the historic Shepherd Hotel, continue to undermine efforts to return to the path to peace, increase tensions and further destabilize the situation on the ground, which is yet another attempt by the occupying Power to overshadow international goodwill towards the people of Palestine.

Namibia believes that the construction and expansion of illegal settlements and the erection of walls of separation and annexation are serious impediments to peace and obstacles to the realization of the two-State solution. The illegal construction of Israeli settlements in and around East Jerusalem in particular is nothing but an attempt to alter the legal status of the city and its physical, demographic and cultural character. They must cease. We call on Israel, as the occupying Power, to stop these provocative activities, which are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace.

Israelis are entitled to live in peace and security, which must be acknowledged. However, the pursuit of security by Israel should not create insecurity for other people in the region, in particular not for civilian populations.

We continue to witness the ongoing deplorable Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, which is a clear punishment of the entire population of Palestine. The hardship and misery being imposed on Gaza is morally unjustifiable and unacceptable by any human standard. The blockade must be lifted immediately and the human rights of the population respected.

The Security Council must take appropriate measures and demonstrate its resolve to protect the civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territories in a manner consistent with international humanitarian law. The international community, and the Security Council in particular, should not cherry-pick, acting as a matter of expediency at times, while ignoring the plight of a people who have been dispossessed of everything, including human dignity, for more than 60 years. Furthermore, the Council should not fail to discharge its responsibility to protect the civilian population as part of its commitment to maintain international peace and security and its duty to implement its resolutions relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the broader Arab-Israeli conflict.

Israel and Palestine must resume negotiations to build confidence, which is a clear and necessary step to build a harmonious future. The international community must not shy away from its responsibility to help the people of Palestine, who have been yearning for freedom for more than 60 years. The time for the international community to act is now. It must garner the necessary political will to act with consistency to uphold international law, the Charter of the United Nations and all relevant Security Council resolutions, with which all States Members of the United Nations, including Israel, are bound to comply.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Namibia's full support for Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's plan to end the occupation of Palestine and achieve the independence of the State of Palestine, living side by side with the State of Israel in peace and security. We call on the Security Council to demonstrate effective leadership and support for that plan.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

Mr. Ordorica (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like, as many other speakers have done, to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his briefing, as well as the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements this morning.

For decades, the international community has been witness to wars, tensions and violence in the Middle East, often with no means to act, hoping that this conflict would one day come to a definitive end and give way to the peaceful coexistence of nations. Today, no efforts have been spared in pursuit of that goal. The United Nations and a number of States, both within and beyond the region, have become directly involved in this complex task. Nonetheless, the conflict continues, and the goal that would provide for its definitive solution — the establishment of a sovereign, independent and economically and politically viable Palestinian State, coexisting peacefully with Israel within secure, internationally recognized borders — has not been achieved.

Dialogue and negotiation must continue and produce tangible results for Palestinians and Israelis. The status quo is not an alternative, as it will only exacerbate tensions and lead to further violence and confrontation, directly affecting the civilian population and destabilizing the region, especially given the current unrest there. We therefore reiterate our concern

at the continuing stalemate in the negotiations between the parties, which has weakened the prospects for peace being achieved in the short and medium term.

During my country's recent term as an elected member of the Security Council, we actively supported efforts aimed at achieving peace in the region and promoting greater involvement on the part of the Council in seeking a lasting solution to this issue. In 20 monthly debates and a number of emergency meetings in 2009 and 2010, we witnessed and participated in the efforts of the Council to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

We remain convinced that the Security Council needs to assume greater responsibility and continue to do everything within its power to re-establish trust and bring about a resumption of substantive negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. For example, with the adoption, against all expectations, of resolution 1860 (2009), we were able to call for a definitive ceasefire in Gaza and for the opening of border crossings to guarantee access for humanitarian aid. Similarly, in June 2010, the Security Council was able to speak in a single voice to condemn the clashes during the attack on the humanitarian flotilla and request an investigation of the facts. The Security Council also came together to establish the parameters for a definitive peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, as shown by the adoption of the presidential statement of 11 May 2009 (S/PRST/2009/14).

Nonetheless, in spite the priority that the Security Council attaches to the resolution of this conflict, those efforts did not have a substantive impact on the ground. In Gaza, resolution 1860 (2009) has not been fully implemented, and the situation seems to have returned to as it was before the military intervention. Rocket attacks have resumed and the humanitarian situation of the residents of the Gaza Strip deteriorates every day, despite the partial opening of the border crossings.

As we have stated since January 2009, we believe that the best way forward, taking Israel's legitimate security concerns into consideration, is to establish an international monitoring mechanism to ensure that the ceasefire is upheld, border crossings fully opened and the illicit trafficking of arms into Gaza effectively controlled, pursuant to resolution 1860 (2009).

Israeli settlements continue to expand in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as do the corresponding evictions and demolitions. We view such settlement expansion and the demolition of Palestinian homes in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, as a serious obstacle to the peace process, contrary to international law and detrimental to the viability of a Palestinian State. We therefore call on Israel to cease these activities immediately in order to give the peace process a real chance.

Regarding the current situation and the recent upsurge in violence, my country condemns all acts of violence, including those promoted by extremist religious elements in the Israeli settlements, and the provocations by Palestinian groups. Such acts only fuel further escalation in the violence. We also urge the parties to refrain from any actions or statements that may lead to incidents of violence and stress that those responsible be punished in accordance with the law.

After a brief resumption resulting from the considerable efforts undertaken by the United States Government, it has not been possible to resume direct peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, despite the fact that they represent the best option for achieving a comprehensive, lasting and mutually acceptable solution that would lead to the establishment of a political and economically viable Palestinian State, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as the Quartet statements of March and September 2010 and February 2011.

We have taken note of the report of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, on the progress made over the past two years in the implementation the programme of the thirteenth Government of the Palestinian Authority. The Quartet supported that programme, through which the Palestinian Authority is endeavouring to build the institutions necessary for the establishment of a State.

The Mexican delegation would like to express its concern regarding what is documented in Coordinator Serry's report, namely, that the main obstacle to the existence of a Palestinian State being declared is the continuing Israeli occupation and the failure of a negotiation process aimed at resolving the conflict between both parties. We also support his indication that it is of the greatest importance that the parties overcome the current impasse and resume negotiations in order to reach a framework agreement on a permanent status that resolves all the core issues and makes the two-State solution a reality.

We would also like to mention the three other reports that which were presented on 13 April, in Brussels, to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, on the progress achieved by the Palestinian Authority.

Our assessment of the situation in the Middle East must take into account the situation in the region. We note with concern the increase in inter-communal tensions in Lebanon, which jeopardize the political balance and the coexistence among the various groups that compose Lebanese society. Violations of resolution 1701 (2006) continue, along with daily incursions by Israeli armed forces into Lebanese territory. We call on Israel and Lebanon, as well on as all political actors involved, to comply with the provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions and to avoid any belligerent rhetoric, which could lead to an escalation of violence. We trust that a Government will be formed as a result of the consultations being led by Prime Minister Mikati.

I should like to conclude by stating that the time has come for difficult and momentous political decisions to be taken by the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian Authority for the benefit of their own peoples and for the sake of international peace and security. We deem the support of the Security Council and of the international community to be of the utmost importance in achieving that objective.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela once again pays tribute to our brother country Colombia on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council.

We welcome the briefing by Mr. Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and we endorse the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt on behalf of the countries members of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The demolition of houses and the continuing retaliatory measures carried out by Israel, the occupying Power, in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, are illegal acts that pose major obstacles to the achievement of peace in the region. Those actions are aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and configuration of Palestinian territory, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and the relevant Security Council and other United Nations resolutions.

We regret that the draft resolution on the illegality of Israeli settlement construction was not adopted, even though it enjoyed the support of the overwhelming majority of States. The United Nations and the Security Council must take the measures necessary for the State of Israel to comply with the resolutions that promote the creation of two States living side by side within peaceful, secure and recognized borders. Our country reaffirms the need for Israel to fully respect the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War in the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and the other occupied Arab territories.

Venezuela appreciates the fact that, over the past few months, a growing number of countries have recognized Palestine as a free and independent State. This constitutes a major contribution to the peace process in the Middle East.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip remains serious owing to the sustained and brutal blockade by the State of Israel. Venezuela demands once again the immediate and unconditional lifting of this illegal and unilateral measure.

Venezuela calls on the State of Israel to respect the sovereignty of Lebanon and avert further conflicts such as that which took place in July 2006. Only through direct negotiations between the parties, as established by resolution 1701 (2006), can constructive solutions be reached.

Venezuela also reiterates the need for Israel to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan, in keeping with resolution 498 (1981) and in compliance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

As several members of the Council have brought up the topic of Libya in this forum, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela would like to reiterate its concern regarding resolution 1973 (2011), which has led to military aggression against that country. If some members of the Council exceed their legal powers and decide of their own accord to redefine international law, the United Nations loses its raison d'être.

I would recall that representatives of 14 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia submitted, on 31 March, a communiqué to the President of the Security Council for the month of March, the Permanent Representative of China, in which we asked this body to work closely with countries and organizations in the region and take urgent measures leading to an immediate ceasefire and a peaceful and sustainable solution reflecting the will of the Libyan people.

What action has been taken by the Security Council to implement the ceasefire and seek peace? What measures are being taken to prevent the military occupation of Libya? The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela opts for peace in the world. That is why President Hugo Chávez Frías has called for the creation of impartial international bodies aimed at promoting dialogue among Libyans and leading to a lasting, sustainable peace.

Allow me to conclude by stating that it is imperative that the military aggression by Israel against the Palestinian people cease, and that an immediate end be put to Jewish settlements in the region. As stated by our President, the only way to achieve peace is by way of justice.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Jomaa (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me first of all to congratulate the Colombian delegation on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We wish you every success in your work, Sir. We would like also to thank the friendly delegation of China for the outstanding manner in which it presided over the Security Council last month. We would also like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing this morning.

My delegation supports the statements made on behalf of the Group of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement.

The negotiation process has now been at a standstill for seven months, despite efforts by a great number of parties to see them resumed. Many had hoped to see the end of this long conflict within the present year through the establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State, within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

Once again, the established goals have been compromised by the situation on the ground, which is characterized by the intransigence of Israeli policies that flagrantly contravene international conventions and go against the negotiating process. That process must be based on trust, good faith and the will to seriously address the issues that determine the fate of a people that has been deprived of its most fundamental rights and suffered the consequences of war and unrest for many years.

The occupying Power, Israel, continues its acts of colonization instead of promoting peace, despite the international consensus as to the illegal nature of such settlements. This complicates the situation and jeopardizes the chances for achieving peace through the two-State solution.

We are all aware of the fact that this colonization reduces the size of the territory that has historically been Palestinian and which is subject to negotiation, thus affecting one of the most important elements of a final settlement. Moreover, the expulsion of Palestinian residents, the confiscation of their land and the demolition of homes and eviction of their owners are all in complete contravention of the relevant legal norms, and the Fourth Geneva Convention in particular, on which the Council has drawn in adopting a great many resolutions that have been decisive with regard to the settlements and the illegal acts perpetrated by the occupying Power, Israel, against the people of Palestine over many decades.

I would like to recall that more than 30 years ago, in March 1980, when Tunisia was a non-permanent member, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 465 (1980). In so doing, the Council adopted a clear and sincere position on the colonization, and the international community has to this day referred to that resolution. However, there has been no real change on the ground and no respect has been shown for international law by this State Member of the United Nations.

Tunisia views the Palestinian question as a matter of national interest. We have always seen it as a priority and consistently and robustly supported our Palestinian brothers. Theirs is a just and legitimate struggle for sovereignty, freedom and dignity.

Tunisia is proud of its glorious revolution of 14 January 2011, a revolution of dignity and freedom. We reassert our commitment to international law and our support for just causes throughout the world, first and foremost the Palestinian question. We reaffirmed our support to President Mahmoud Abbas when he visited our country from 18 to 20 April during his discussions with various leaders. This position was reaffirmed by the people of Tunisia on many occasions throughout and at the culmination of our revolution.

Tunisia calls for the occupying Power, Israel, to bring an immediate end to its settlement activities and to respect its commitments under international law, international humanitarian law, the Road Map and the peace process. Tunisia calls on all parties concerned, and in particular the international Quartet, to assume their responsibilities to respond to the intransigent Israeli position of refusing to respect international law and do what is needed to achieve a just peace.

We reject all measures aimed at altering the religious, demographic and social identity of Jerusalem. We thoroughly reject attacks on the holy sites, arbitrary expulsions and the separation of families. We condemn Israel's continued perpetration of such acts and call on the international community to adopt a strong position in order to put an end to those actions and to prevent the imposition of a status quo.

The situation in Gaza, as has been said by many people on many occasions, will only lead to greater unrest. The latest acts of aggression against Palestinian civilians underscore the danger of a new cycle of violence, which would further increase the suffering of the Palestinian people, whose wounds have not yet healed following the aggression against Gaza of December 2008 and January 2009.

Tunisia reiterates its position in support of international protection for the Palestinian people. We affirm the need for the occupying Power to respect its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention. We caution against any acts of violence, which would only detract from peace efforts and destroy any hope for a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

With regard to the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, Tunisia reaffirms that comprehensive and just peace with Israel can be achieved only through Israel's complete withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories to the line of 4 June 1967, including East Jerusalem, the occupied Syrian Arab Golan and the territory still occupied in southern Lebanon.

The establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, in keeping with the Arab Peace Initiative, is important for the realization of a fair solution to this issue based on the resolutions of the United Nations. The people of the Middle East have suffered far too long. We must bring the occupation of Arab lands to an end in order to promote the security and stability of the region. The security of the region is linked to the security and stability of the whole world. Indeed, global security is linked to security in the Middle East.

We must not allow a return to tension, confrontation and attacks against civilians. To prevent such a scenario, we must adopt urgent, decisive measures to address the underlying causes of these tensions.

Given the extremely sensitive circumstances at present, there is greater need than ever for us to save the peace process so as to meet the aspirations of the peoples of the region and support the just cause of the right of the Palestinian people to freedom, dignity and an independent State, on the basis of international will.

We call on all parties to go beyond mere rhetoric and to undertake courageous initiatives that show sincere and robust will to jointly assume the historic responsibility to bring an end to this long-standing and bitter conflict, which has taken a heavy toll on the region in terms of both property and human life. This conflict has deprived the people of the region of stability and development and forced them to live in constant fear.

Despite this situation, those who are calling for peace, dialogue, negotiations, a settlement of the conflict, and security and lasting peace in the region remain strong in their hope for a change on the ground leading to the two-State solution and an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian-Arab territory. We must support their voices.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, I appreciate your efforts during your presidency of the Security Council this month and I thank you for convening this meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

I align myself with the statements delivered by the representative of Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Group of Arab States, the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and the representative of Tajikistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. I also thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing and stress the importance of the role of the Secretariat in accurately reporting the facts on the ground in the occupied Arab territories and the impact of the prolonged Israeli occupation on stability not only in the Middle East but around the world. I also welcome the participation of Mr. Pedro Serrano, Acting Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, and of Mr. Abdou Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in this meeting.

The world has recently borne witness to the radical position of the Israeli Government, which has shirked its internationally agreed obligations and brought the peace negotiations to a deadlock while remaining immune to accountability. Such behaviour thwarts the efforts of the Council to send a clear signal to Israel that the world can no longer accept the continuation of illegal settlements and the occupation of Arab territories since 1967. Especially in light of the current turmoil in the Arab world, it is mistaken to believe that the flexibility of Arab States and the efforts of the Quartet and the Secretary-General will continue forever. Unfortunately, the Israeli Government persists in its illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories and the occupied Syrian Golan, in defiance of the demands of the Quartet, the Committee of Ministers for the Arab Peace Initiative, and the two-thirds of the members of the international community that stand ready to recognize the Palestinian State.

There is an international consensus today in favour of the two-State solution of Palestine and Israel, living side by side in p ace. We must take advantage of this consensus and n mentum to avoid a regional confrontation that is not unlikely to erupt in the present circumstances. The leaders of Israel ought to take this danger seriously.

The position of Arab and peace-loving States is in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, including those of the Security Council. The establishment of a lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can be based only on the principle of land for peace and international legality.

We reiterate our firm rejection of the illegal measures taken by Israel in occupied East Jerusalem and its attempts to change the Arab identity, demographic composition, legal status and religious character of the city, and we stress that all such attempts are null and void and without effect. The international community must reject the attempts of the Israeli Government to undermine the Islamic and Christian holy sites, demolish houses in the city, expel Arab residents and revoke their residency rights with the aim of Judaizing the city. Such attempts violate the obligations of Israel, the occupying Power, under international law, are inconsistent with the relevant decisions of the United Nations, and undermine the foundations of a peaceful solution to the Palestinian question and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

While the Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory continues, we note ongoing Israeli violations of airspace and espionage activities, which pose a threat to Lebanese sovereignty and violate resolution 1701 (2006). Israel also continues to occupy the Syrian Golan Heights and deplete its wealth. It has scaled up its settlement policy there alongside its policy in Palestine, expelling Arabs and demolishing their homes in an attempt to change the identity and structure of the occupied territory, in contempt of basic human rights and in violation of international law. We reaffirm here the decisions of the General Assembly, which has declared invalid the Israeli decision to annex the Golan and affirmed the need to return it to Syria, in implementation of resolution 497 (1981). We also reaffirm the need for the remaining occupied Lebanese territories to be returned to Lebanon and for the right of the Lebanese to defend their territory to be recognized.

I recall that this Council has the responsibility to achieve peace in the Middle East; that is particularly true of the five permanent members, which have a historic and political responsibility vis-à-vis the current situation. The solution exists, provided that there is political will to create conditions conducive to the establishment and viability of an independent Palestinian State and the recognition of its borders based on those of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In conclusion, I recall that the right to struggle for liberation from foreign occupation is a legitimate right that cannot be equated with military aggression by occupation forces.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Mohamed (Maldives): Let me begin by expressing our profound appreciation for the opportunity to address the Security Council during this important debate on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine.

It is with great concern that we note the ongoing violence in the Middle East. While we applaud the international community in its implementation of resolution 1973 (2011) in Libya, my Government feels that more needs to be done in the Middle East to preserve the basic and fundamental rights of the region's populations and to end the ongoing violence.

The Maldives, as a State member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), strongly believes that peace and prosperity in the Middle East can be achieved only by empowering the people to bring in much-needed social, economic and political reforms that would lead to a more democratic and representative system of Government. In our own experience, the suppression of human rights and basic freedoms is hugely counterproductive and eventually leads to the disintegration of societal norms. We urge the international community, especially the members of the League of Arab States and the OIC, to assist their fellow member States going through similar periods of transition in building the institutional infrastructure necessary to complete the transition to a system of governance that is best defined by their respective peoples.

On the question of Palestine, the position of my Government is well known. We are hugely disappointed to note the continued suffering of the Palestinian people. They have been denied their rights to self-determination and to live in peace and freedom in their own independent State for far too long. While recognizing the rights of the Palestinians, we also appreciate and support the right of the people of Israel to live in peace and security alongside an independent and sovereign State of Palestine.

The Israeli settlement is another issue of concern. The Maldives recognizes the Israeli right to housing, but at the same time the rights of Palestinians should not be trampled. Therefore the Maldives calls on Israel to freeze the expansion of all settlements in the occupied territories.

In conclusion, the Maldives does not wish to see another generation of Palestinians grow up under the yoke established by the occupation and the blockade, which perpetuates the extreme poverty and depravity witnessed over the past 63 years. We urge all countries to support the pillars that will provide an enduring solution to the conflict for the people of this region. Violence will never bring peace to the Middle East; instead it will create more violence, shed more blood and increase hatred on both sides. My Government therefore strongly believes that peace will be established in the Middle East only when a sovereign State of Palestine is formed.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this open debate on the situation in the Middle East. The issue under discussion is of paramount importance, and this meeting is all the more important in the light of new developments taking place in the region.

The Israeli regime continues to defy international law by continuing its unlawful and inhuman blockade against Palestinians, in particular in the Gaza strip, while the damages inflicted on Gaza as a result of the occupying regime's 2009 onslaught are yet to be remedied. The report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (A/HRC/12/48) constitutes an important step in remedying the violations of the Israeli regime in Gaza. When it was issued, the report raised hopes that action would be taken by the relevant bodies of the United Nations, including the Security Council, to put an end to the culture of impunity for Israeli war crimes.

However, no credible action has been taken to that end. Attempts are still being made to whitewash the atrocities committed by the Israeli war machine. What would remain of the credibility of the United Nations if no action were taken on the report? United Nations bodies, including the Council, should ensure the full and immediate implementation of the recommendations contained in the Goldstone report. Impunity for perpetrators of crimes of a grave nature is in itself a cause and incentive for further atrocities. In that regard, we welcome the efforts by the Government of Switzerland, in its capacity as depositary of the Geneva

Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, to reconvene the Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to consider measures to enforce the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territory. We hope that the Conference can be held before September.

We also look forward to a comprehensive report by the Secretary-General on the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations of the Fact-Finding Mission by all concerned parties, including United Nations bodies and, in particular, the Security Council.

It is regrettable to witness that inaction by relevant United Nations organs in dealing with the Israeli regime's unlawful and inhuman policies and oppressive practices against the populations of the occupied territories has emboldened this dangerous regime to continue its crimes against the defenceless Palestinian people. The generous support by certain Powers for the Israeli regime has been some of the most consequential support in contemporary history. That support has been provided to the detriment of regional peace and stability, as well as Palestinians' basic human rights. Last February, the Council again failed to take action on a draft resolution (S/2011/24) that simply underlined the urgency of putting an end to the Israeli apartheid regime's unlawful campaign to destroy Palestinian homes and build new settlement units (see S/PV.6484).

The draft resolution was doomed to failure simply because just one permanent member resorted to its privileged veto right and obstructed the Security Council from action. That was of course not the first time, as the United States has a long recorded history of covering up the atrocities committed by the Israeli regime, and hence sharing the regime's crimes as an accomplice. Blocking actions by the Council will only embolden the Israeli regime to continue its inhuman and war-mongering policies with impunity and to violate internationally recognized human rights and humanitarian law without any consequences.

The Israeli regime has persisted in its aggressive policies towards Lebanon by constantly violating its land, sea and air space and refusing to withdraw from Lebanese occupied territory. It also refuses to withdraw from the Golan Heights. This regime is continuing its hostile and provocative policy of spying against Lebanon. Recently, sophisticated spying equipment was detected and confiscated — the second such incident in less than a year. This is a blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Achieving a peaceful and just settlement of the question of Palestine is imperative for the realization of comprehensive and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East and beyond. In our view, lasting peace in Palestine and the region will be possible only through justice and putting an end to discriminatory and racist policies and ending the occupation of Palestine and other occupied territories. Today, we see more and more States joining the ranks of those that have already recognized Palestine as an independent State. This is a very clear indication that the cause of Palestine is taking on new momentum. Let us hope that oppression and occupation will end and justice and freedom will prevail in the Palestinian occupied territory.

Before I conclude, I would like to react to the reference made to my country by the representatives of the United States and the Israeli regime. I would like to place on record that my delegation rejects the baseless allegations and distortions made in the Chamber, which are intended to distract the attention of the international community from the facts concerning the criminal policies and abhorrent atrocities in the region committed by the Israeli regime, in particular the heinous crimes committed against the people of Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.